



# Combat and Operational Stress Control

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## Battlemind Psychological Debrief

COSC.....the mission  
never ends

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## BRIEFING OUTLINE

**PURPOSE:** Given a potentially traumatic event, provide traumatic event management and a psychological debrief.

1. TEM
2. VA/DoD PD  
recommendations
3. Battlemind Psychological  
Debrief



# Battlemind Psychological Debriefing

Military personnel are routinely deployed on operations that place them at risk for exposure to significant stressors. These deployment-related stressors range from the hassles of deployed life to the dangers of combat exposure (Adler, Litz, & Bartone, 2003; Hoge, Castro, Messer, McGurk, Cotting, & Koffman, 2004).



# Battlemind Psychological Debriefing

Battlemind Psychological Debriefing is designed for use in three different ways:

- (1) **in-theatre *event-driven* debriefing** that occurs following a potentially traumatizing event during deployment;
- (2) **in-theatre *time-driven* debriefing** that occurs at specified time points during deployment to address the cumulative effects of the deployment
- (3) **immediate *post-deployment* debriefing** to facilitate the transition from combat to home.



# The goal of Battlemind Psychological Debriefings

- Battlemind Psychological Debriefings are structured group discussions designed to support military personnel in their transition back to duty after a significant incident (in-theatre) or from the combat environment to the home environment at postdeployment.



# The goal of Battlemind Psychological Debriefings

- Battlemind Psychological Debriefings are **NOT** expected to prevent the development of a psychiatric disorder for any one individual but are expected to reduce the level of mental health symptoms for the unit overall.



# **Battlemind Psychological Debriefings Target Population**

- should be members of a platoon or equivalent team, typically involving about 20 to 30 individuals.
- should include all ranks in that platoon, including the platoon leadership.
- If necessary, Battlemind Psychological Debriefings may be conducted with partial platoons but it is preferable for the entire platoon to be present.



# Battlemind Psychological Debriefing Facilitators

- Battlemind Psychological Debriefings need to have at least two facilitators: a leader and one co-facilitator.
  - Preferable to have at least one uniformed facilitator.
  - best to have a 10:1, service member: facilitator ratio.
- Facilitators should:
  - Be military officers with combat deployment experience who are also trained in some behavioral health specialty (COSC AOCs or Chaplains).
- Co-facilitators could:
  - Be enlisted service members with related specialties (COSC MOSs)
  - Trained in Battlemind PD (any AOC/MOS or Civilian)





## **Facilitator Role**

The Battlemind Psychological Debriefing facilitator has two primary jobs:

- To establish rapport with the group, setting a tone of respect and emotional safety.
- To transition the group through each of the phases.



## Timing

- In-theatre Battlemind Psychological Debriefing:
  - Event Driven: Conducted after individual PTE exposure
  - Time Driven: Conducted at specific times during the deployment
- Post-deployment Psychological Debriefings:
  - conducted during the reintegration process, within two weeks of service members returning home from a deployment, or even at a third location decompression site.



## Definition

- **Potentially Traumatizing Event**  
(PTE): A traumatic event is an experience that causes physical, emotional, psychological distress, or harm. It is an event that is perceived and experienced as a threat to one's safety or to the stability of one's world.



# Setting

- Battlemind Psychological Debriefings should not be conducted:
  - At the end of long duty days (duty days longer than 10 hours).
  - Service members are either physically or emotionally exhausted.
- While no exact day has been identified as optimal, it is recommended that Battlemind Psychological Debriefings be conducted as the last activity of the day.



# Setting

- Should utilize a facility large enough for all participants and facilitators and secure enough to complete briefing with minimal distractions
- Prior to the Battlemind Psychological Debriefing, chairs should be placed in a circle, with the facilitator and co-facilitator seated across from one another with the co-facilitator seated near the door.
- The Battlemind Psychological Debriefing can be expected to take about 60 to 120 minutes.



# Preparing for Battlemind Psychological Debriefing

- **Talking with Leaders.**

- Lead facilitator should communicate with key group leader to conduct a TEM UNA to obtain significant issues of importance and to educate on expectations:

- (1) normalize the experience of the significant event or the post-deployment transition
- (2) talk about events and feelings
- (3) reinforce the meaning of the unit's sacrifice
- (4) prepare the unit psychologically to return to duty



# Identifying Local Resources.

- Battlemind Psychological Debriefing team members need to know what local mental health resources are available to service members.
- Before the debriefing begins, facilitators need to prepare a business-size card or handout with all the key local resources listed and their telephone numbers.
- These cards (or handouts) need to be reproduced and handed out to all unit members at the end of the Battlemind Psychological Debriefing.



# BM PD vs Existing PD Models

- Battlemind Psychological Debriefing is unique from other debriefing models in that it:
  - integrates military culture into the ground rules
  - Discusses positive and negative reactions
  - Does not differentiate between cognitive and emotional reactions
  - Focuses on Battlemind concepts
  - Addresses the concept of stigma
  - Highlights the need for buddy care and leader care
  - Explicitly acknowledges the sacrifice of participants





## BM PD vs Existing PD Models

- Additionally, Post-deployment Battlemind Psychological Debriefings are unique in that they explicitly discuss the transition home given that changes experienced on long combat deployments present challenges to reintegrating with family and friends.



# COSC Program Management Office



## PD Comparison Chart

Phase	Historical Event Reconstruction Debriefing (HERD)	Group Crisis Intervention National Organization for Victim Assistance (GCI NOVA)	After-Action Debriefing	Critical Event Debriefing (CED)	Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD)	Battlemind Psychological Debriefing (In-Theatre)	Battlemind Psychological Debriefing (Post-Deployment)
1	Introduction	Introduction	Purpose and Ground rules	Introduction	Introduction	Introduction	Introduction
2	Chronological Reconstruction	Event	Event Reconstruction	Chronological Reconstruction	Fact	Event	Event
3		Aftermath	Group Consensus of Event	Cognitive Affective Reactions	Thought	Reactions	Reactions
4		Expectations Future	Thoughts and Feelings		Reaction		
5		Education	Emotional Validation	Symptoms	Symptom	Self and Buddy-Aid	Transition
6		Conclusion	Prevention of Scapegoating	Teaching	Teaching		Training/ Adjustment
7			Symptoms	Wrap-up	Re-Entry	Battlemind Focus	Resetting
8			Lessons Learned				



# BM PD Stages

- Although there are similarities between the phases used in-theatre and those used at postdeployment, there are also major differences. Therefore, the five phases for in-theatre will be presented first, followed by the six phases for post-deployment.



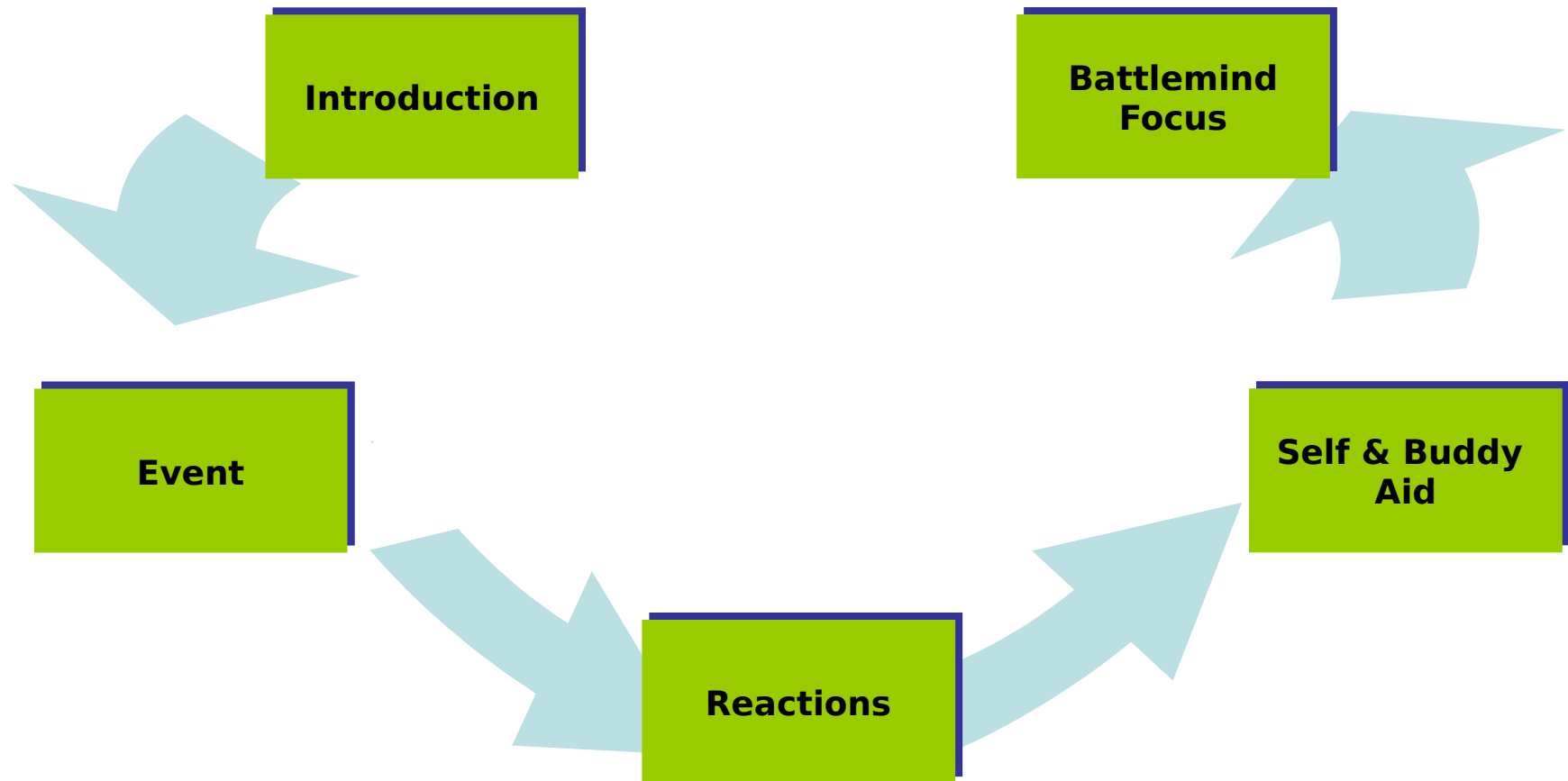
# In-Theater Battlemind Psychological Debrief

PHASES





# **Battlemind PD Process In-Theater**





# Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief

## Introduction Phase

- Goals:
  - Event Driven:
    - **Designed to talk about what happened (PTE) with the emphasis that the unit is going to have to return to duty. Provides time set-aside to talk about what happened.**
  - Time Driven:
    - **Designed to help units take some time to think about the deployment so far, to take a moment to talk about how things are going.**



# **Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief**

## **Introduction Phase**

- **Guidelines**
  - **“Is there anyone here that doesn’t belong?”**
  - **“Training will take about 1 to 2 hours - it depends on how you chose to use the time.”**
  - **“There will be no breaks.”**
  - **“The Battlemind Psychological Debriefing is confidential.”**
  - **“There is a limit to what can be promised in terms of confidentiality (UCMJ).”**
  - **“We want everyone in the group to participate. However, we want you to only talk about what you feel comfortable talking about.”**
  - **“Speak only for yourself. Don’t judge what others say.”**
  - **“All opinions are important, but be respectful of rank.”**
  - **“No leadership bashing.”**
  - **“You may ask questions at any time.”**
  - **“We will be around at the end.”**



# Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief

## Event Phase

- The goal of this phase is to have service members begin to talk about the specific stressful event(s) they experienced.
- Event Driven:
  - “I’m going to go around the room and ask you to think about the event. Briefly say where you were when the event happened and what you were doing.”
- Time Driven:
  - “A lot has happened over the last several months. If you were to think about one or two events that were the most difficult, the ones that still stick with you, what would they be? What were the toughest events?”





# Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief Event Phase

- Guidelines
  - The facilitator should turn to the left and look at the first person. If someone discusses aspects that are part of subsequent phases or irrelevant topics, simply restate the question before the next person begins.
  - The facilitator does not need to repeat back what each person says.



# Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief

## Event Phase

- Guidelines

- *Event-driven debriefing:*

- In event-driven debriefing, at the end of this phase, and in transitioning to the next phase, the facilitator should very briefly summarize the variety of perspectives with a statement like:

**“combat is hard; the event(s) you just described confirm that. Whether you were physically there or not, the event affected you all.”**



# Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief

## Event Phase

- Guidelines

- *Time-driven debriefing:*

- In time-driven debriefing, at the end of this phase, and in transitioning to the next phase, the facilitator should summarize with a statement such as

**“you’ve talked about a lot of really difficult things. You’ve talked about the ....”**



# Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief

## Reaction Phase

- The goal of this phase is to have the service members begin to consider and normalize their thoughts and reactions. This phase begins by asking about cognitive responses and moves on to include emotional reactions as well.
  - *Event-driven debriefing:*  
**"Now think about the event."**
  - *Time-driven debriefing:*  
**"Now think about the events you mentioned."**



# Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief Reaction Phase

- Guidelines
  - “What were your first thoughts about the event when you went off ‘autopilot’? What were your first thoughts when your thinking kicked in?”
  - “Now I’m going to open the question up to the group. When you think about the event(s), what was the worst part for you?”
- Whenever possible, normalize thoughts and feelings by saying something like, **“Many service members tell us they thought that or felt that way...”**



# Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief

## Reaction Phase

- One typical theme includes second-guessing and wishing:
  - **“Many service members think about what else they could have done [give examples], but the fact is that IEDs [or whatever the actual event was] occur at random; combat is not predictable. Service members, and especially leaders, wish it could be predictable; they wish there was something they could have done. But the fact is that combat is random and really bad stuff happens.”**
- Other than this topic, it isn't necessary to try to “fix” or “explain away” reactions service members may be having.



## **Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief** **Self and Buddy Aid Phase**

- The goal of this phase is to identify three common symptoms that service members experience during a combat deployment, normalize those symptoms and emphasize what service members can do for themselves or their buddies.



# Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief

## Self and Buddy Aid Phase

- *Event-driven debriefing:*

**“Even though this is hard, most of you will be okay. Still, after an event like what we have just discussed [may state actual event or a generic statement like death of unit member], there are common symptoms that you may notice in yourself or your buddy. I’d like to highlight three of these for you.”**

- *Time-driven debriefing:*

**“Even though some of the things that have happened on the deployment have been hard to deal with, most of you are doing just fine. Still, after being in theatre for [x] months, many service members describe changes that they’ve gone through. I’d like to highlight three of these for you.”**





# Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief

## Self and Buddy Aid Phase

- Guidelines (Common Symptoms):

- *Anger:*

**“After many events service members become angry and aggressive; they have a very short fuse. They may want “pay-back” for what happened. The key is to continue to maintain control of your emotions just like you’ve been doing. It’s ok to be angry, you just can’t act on it and you must ensure that you and your buddies follow the ROEs and treat noncombatants with dignity and respect whether you think they deserve it or not. Remember, you are a professional Soldier [or Marine, Sailor, or Airman] and that’s what distinguishes you from the insurgents.”**



# Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief

## Self and Buddy Aid Phase

- Guidelines (Common Symptoms):
  - *Withdrawal:*

**“Another common symptom is ‘shutting down’, feeling like you can’t continue. Have you guys seen Soldiers do this?”** [allow time for discussion]
  - *Sleep:*

**“Many of you may find yourself having difficulty sleeping; some of you may already have difficulty sleeping that is unrelated to the event. It’s important that you get good sleep otherwise you’ll be fatigued and it will affect your performance. Some service members have a hard time getting to sleep; others have a hard time staying asleep; some have nightmares, or a combination of these.”**



# **Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief**

## **Self and Buddy Aid Phase**

- **Guidelines:**
  - In transitioning from this stage, the facilitator should highlight the importance of buddy-aid.



# **Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief**

## **Battlemind Focus Phase**

- In this phase, the goals are to:
  - Reinforce the Battlemind principles
  - Leave the group with a healthy, positive perspective to continue the mission.



# Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief

## Battlemind Focus Phase

- Guidelines (**Battlemind Principles**)
  - “steeling” your Battlemind
  - “Just because you’ve experienced setbacks, you can still expect to succeed.”**
  - Trust your training
  - “You might find yourself second-guessing decisions you’ve made, avoid doing this so you continue to be successful. It’s important for you to remember to trust your training and the decisions you make.”**



# Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief

## Battlemind Focus Phase

- Guidelines (**Battlemind Principles**)
  - Listen to your leaders

**“Your leaders care about you, but sometimes they don’t show that very well. Don’t be afraid to go to them if you or your buddies are having a problem. If you’re a leader, you need to be receptive when a Soldier comes to you with an issue.”**
  - Be a buddy

**“Be a buddy - We’ve already talked about this; you guys need to continue to look out for each other. Part of that is talking to each other about what happened and listening to what your buddy has to say.”**



# **Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief**

## **Battlemind Focus Phase**

- **Guidelines**

- The facilitators **MUST** know ahead of time what resources are available. They also need to have a referral list prepared (the size of a business card) that they will hand out as service members leave the session.



# **Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief**

## **End of Session**

- Hand out the card as service members depart the room. Provide extra cards to the unit leaders or anyone else who asks for them. Approach those who may be in need of an immediate referral to check in with them, providing assistance as needed.





## Debrief AAR

- Facilitators should always remember to:
  - Take time to unwind after conducting a Battlemind Psychological Debriefing.
  - It's not ideal to go directly into another session.
  - At the end of each day, try to have a quick meeting to see how things are going.
  - Stay positive with one another.



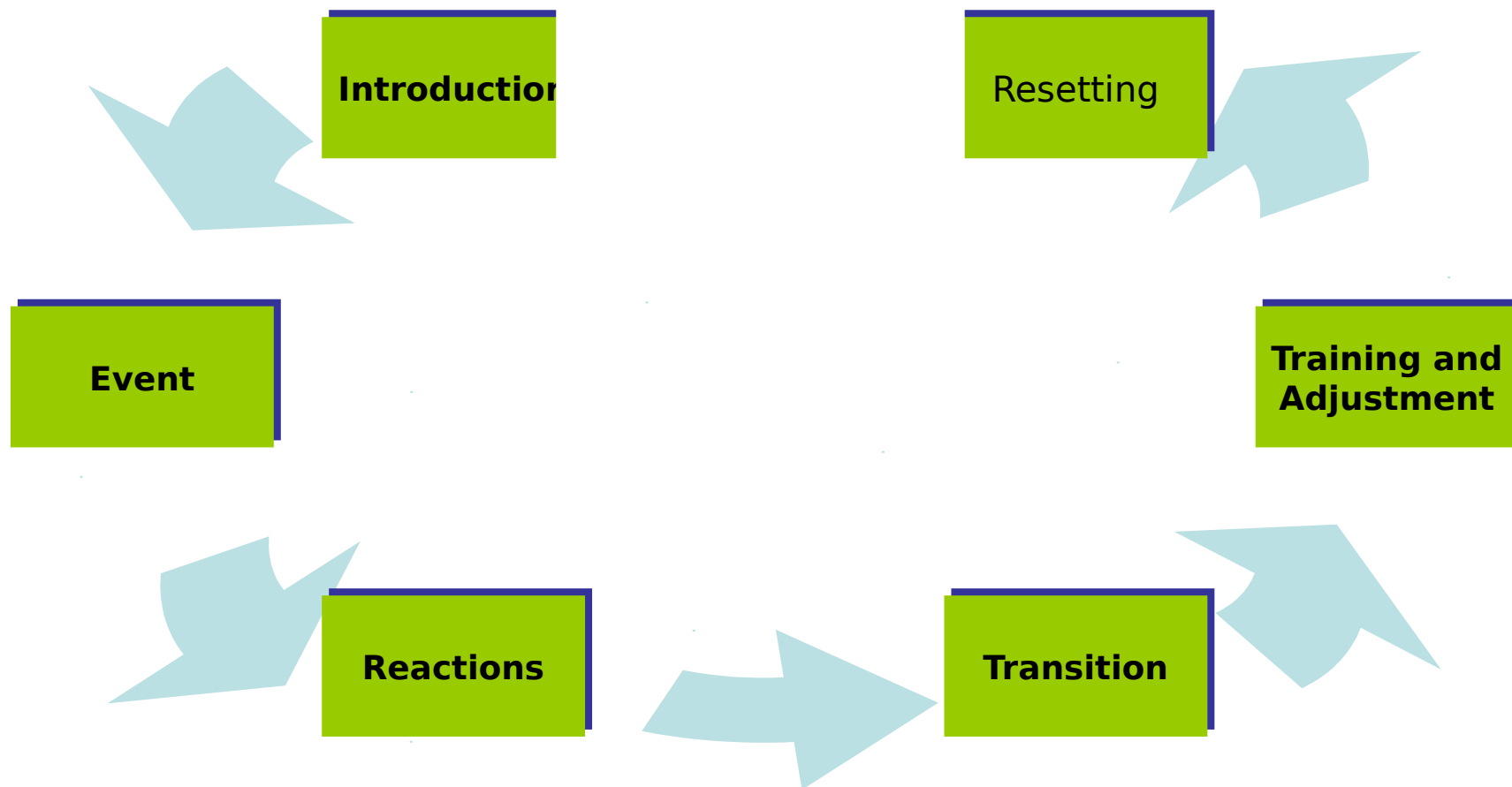
# Post-Deployment Battlemind Psychological Debrief

## PHASES





# **Battlemind PD Process Post-Deployment**





# Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debriefing

## Introduction Phase

- Goals:

- The goal of the introduction is to establish the climate and the ground rules for the Battlemind Psychological Debriefing.
- The facilitator then needs to explain the goal of the Battlemind Psychological Debriefing. These remarks could be something like this:

**“This training is designed to give each of you a chance to talk about your experiences on the deployment and to facilitate the reintegration and reunion process.”**



# Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief

## Introduction Phase

- Guidelines

- Clarify misperceptions of BM PD:

**“Let me tell you what this group is NOT...This is NOT therapy, this is NOT an investigation, and it’s NOT a critique of your job. It IS a psychological debriefing about your deployment experiences and a chance to hear different perspectives and reactions. In addition, we’ll talk about some things that will help you have a smoother transition back home.”**



# **Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief**

## **• Guidelines Introduction Phase**

- “Is there anyone here that doesn’t belong?”**
- “Training will take about 1 to 2 hours - it depends on how you chose to use the time.”**
- “There will be no breaks.”**
- “The Battlemind Psychological Debriefing is confidential.”**
- “There is a limit to what can be promised in terms of confidentiality (UCMJ).”**
- “We want everyone in the group to participate. However, we want you to only talk about what you feel comfortable talking about.”**



# Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief

## Introduction Phase

- Guidelines

- **“Speak only for yourself. Don’t judge what others say.”**
- **“All opinions are important, but be respectful of rank.”**
- **“No leadership bashing.”**
- **“Please turn off your cell phones and pagers.”**
- **“You may ask questions at any time.”**
- **“We will be around at the end.”**



# Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief

## Event Phase

- The goal of this phase is to have service members begin to think about specific stressful events they experienced on the deployment. It is important to keep the discussion from being a general agreement that the deployment was pointless. It is important to set the expectation that this is a place where difficult experiences are okay to share.





# Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief

## Event Phase

- Guidelines

- Go around the room (e.g., to the left of the facilitator) and ask something like this:

**“You have experienced many things on the deployment. If you were to think of one or two events that were the most difficult, the ones that still stick with you, the ones you just can’t shake, what would they be? What were the toughest events?”**



# Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief Event Phase

## • Guidelines

- At the end of this phase, and in transitioning to the next phase, the facilitator should summarize with a statement such as **“you’ve talked about a lot of really difficult things. You’ve talked about the ....”** The facilitator should try to recall some specifics to prevent remarks from becoming too generic. For example, the facilitator could remind the group **“you’ve talked about the loss of Sergeant Sanchez, about the ambush in December, about getting hit by sniper fire...”**



# **Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief**

## **Reaction Phase**

- The goal of this phase is to have the service members begin to consider and normalize their thoughts and reactions. This phase begins by asking about cognitive responses and moves on to include emotional reactions as well.



# Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief Reaction Phase

- Guidelines
  - Go around the room (e.g., the facilitator should begin again with the service member on the left hand side) and ask something like this: **"Now think about the events you mentioned. What were your first thoughts about the event when you went off 'autopilot'? What were your first thoughts when your thinking kicked in?"**



# **Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief**

## **Transition Phase**

- The goal of the transition phase is to identify the ways in which service members have changed as a result of the deployment.



## Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief

### •Guidelines: **Transition Phase**

- The transition phase differs from the proceeding Reactions Phase because the emphasis is on how the service members have changed as a result of the deployment as a whole and how they are currently doing, not on how they reacted to the most difficult events of the deployment.

**“You’ve mentioned some pretty tough stuff. Each service member reacts differently to difficult events. How have you changed since the deployment?”**



# Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief

## Transition Phase

- Guidelines:

- The facilitator(s) can add additional reactions by saying something like **“Many service members have also mentioned that they have experienced ....”**:
  - Difficulty sleeping
  - Not wanting to be with others
  - Not relating to people who weren't there
  - Being hyper-reactive
  - Feeling impatient with people's little problems “the stupid shit”
  - Over-reacting, snapping at people
  - Appreciating the little things more in life, like porcelain toilets
  - Having problems adjusting to civilian driving – driving erratically, too fast, overreacting other vehicles
  - Feeling unsafe



# **Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief Transition Phase**

- **Guidelines:**

- It is very important that the positive aspects of the deployment be emphasized. Many service members report:
  - Appreciating the little things in life more (i.e. porcelain toilets)
  - Valuing friends and family more
  - Becoming closer to unit members
  - Keeping focused on what's really important in life
  - Being able to do the job they were trained to do in the Army
  - Being a leader in combat, displaying courage, etc.





# Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief Training and Adjustment Phase

- The goal of the training/adjustment phase is to incorporate Battlemind concepts in describing actions that service members can take and thoughts service members can keep in mind to help adjust to life back home.



# Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief

## Training and Adjustment Phase

### • Guidelines

- The facilitator can say something like: **“Many service members returning from OIF/OEF have reported the same kinds of reactions you have mentioned [briefly list out examples]. So these are common, normal reactions. Transitioning home takes time and things like sleep problems or being hyper-alert will get better over time.”**
- Facilitators should be sure not to medicalize symptoms that service members report.



## Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief

### • Guidelines **Training and Adjustment Phase**

- The focus should be kept on the fact that after a year of living in a combat environment, service members have changed and it may take a while, roughly 3 to 4 months, for some of these changes to settle down.
- As a reminder, Battlemind Training emphasizes combat skills that helped service members survive a year-long deployment. Adapting these same skills can help with adjusting to home but if service members don't adapt these skills, their transition may run into trouble.



# Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief

## Training and Adjustment Phase

### • Guidelines (**Battlemind Principles**)

- **Feeling aggressive is normal.**
- **Remember what you need to be in control of and what you don't need to be in control of.**
- **Acknowledge that friends and family members have been successful while you were gone and may have developed new ways of doing things.**
- **After a combat deployment, many service members talk about feeling like they need to have a weapon on them to feel safe.**
- **Being keyed up and hyper alert is also typical.**
- **Don't self-medicate.**



# **Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief**

## **Training and Adjustment Phase**

### **• Guidelines (Battlemind Principles)**

- Be a buddy, don't encourage others to drink.**
- One of the best ways to get control of being keyed up is to exercise.**
- Do fun things.**
- Be proud of your service and the sacrifices you and your family had to make.**
- Everyone here probably knows someone who was injured or killed during the deployment.**
- Re-build relationships, rely on your buddies, keep in contact, but balance this with spending time with family members as a group and individually.**



# Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debriefing Resetting Your Battlemind Phase

- In the resetting phase, the goals are to:
  - (1) Prepare the group to end the discussion.
  - (2) To reinforce the Battlemind Psychological Debriefing message that service members deserve the right to a good transition.
  - (3) To remind Service members of their responsibility to refer others and to inform them of referral resources.
  - (4) To leave the group with a positive perspective.



# Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief

## Resetting Your Battlemind Phase

### • Guidelines

- First, to transition, the facilitator can say something direct like **“This is the last part.”**
- Second, one reality of the current deployment situation is that post-deployment is also in part a time to begin to get service members ready to go back to combat.
- Third, service members need to be reminded that they need to continue to look out for one another.



# **Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief**

## **Resetting Your Battlemind Phase**

- **Guidelines**

- The facilitators **MUST** know ahead of time what resources are available. They also need to have a referral list prepared (the size of a business card) that they will hand out as service members leave the session.





# Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief

## Resetting Your Battlemind Phase

### • Guidelines

- In addition, facilitators can say something like: **“Most of you are going to be fine, but your buddy may need help and you can encourage or even help him/her get it. Recognizing and seeking help when you or your friend needs it is a sign of leadership and strength.”**
- Address stigma with something like: **“Often, service members who need help are the least likely to get it because of concerns they may have about stigma, about being seen differently, being considered weak, or maybe harming their career.”**



# Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief

## Resetting Your Battlemind Phase

- Guidelines

- Fourth, service members can cognitively reframe the experience (this may be particularly relevant for groups that have not spontaneously discussed positive personal changes since the deployment). Facilitators can ask something like: **“If there was one good thing to come out of this experience, what would it be?”**
- If this has already been covered in an earlier phase, only reiterate it briefly, but it’s important to emphasize the positives of a combat deployment.



# Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief

## Resetting Your Battlemind Phase

- Guidelines

- As the facilitator ends the session, they can say something that basically thanks the service members for their service and that acknowledges the personal sacrifice that service members have made. The facilitator can say something like:

**“Thanks for what you did and for the sacrifices you and your family made and continue to make.”**



# **Phases of Battlemind Psychological Debrief**

## **End of Session**

- Hand out the card as service members depart the room. Provide extra cards to the unit leaders or anyone else who asks for them. Approach those who may be in need of an immediate referral to check in with them, providing assistance as needed.



# Common Mistakes and Problems

- **Missed Phase**

- Wait until a service member is done speaking and then ask the appropriate transition question.

- **One Service Member Dominates the Discussion**

- Try to redirect the group and involve more participation by restating the original question and looking at others when doing so. Be careful not to cut anyone off.

- **The Group Isn't Talking**

- Mention what other service members have described as part of their experience.
- Let silence work for the team leader and be patient



## Debrief AAR

- Facilitators should always remember to:
  - Take time to unwind after conducting a Battlemind Psychological Debriefing.
  - It's not ideal to go directly into another session.
  - At the end of each day, try to have a quick meeting to see how things are going.
  - Stay positive with one another.



# QUESTIONS?

